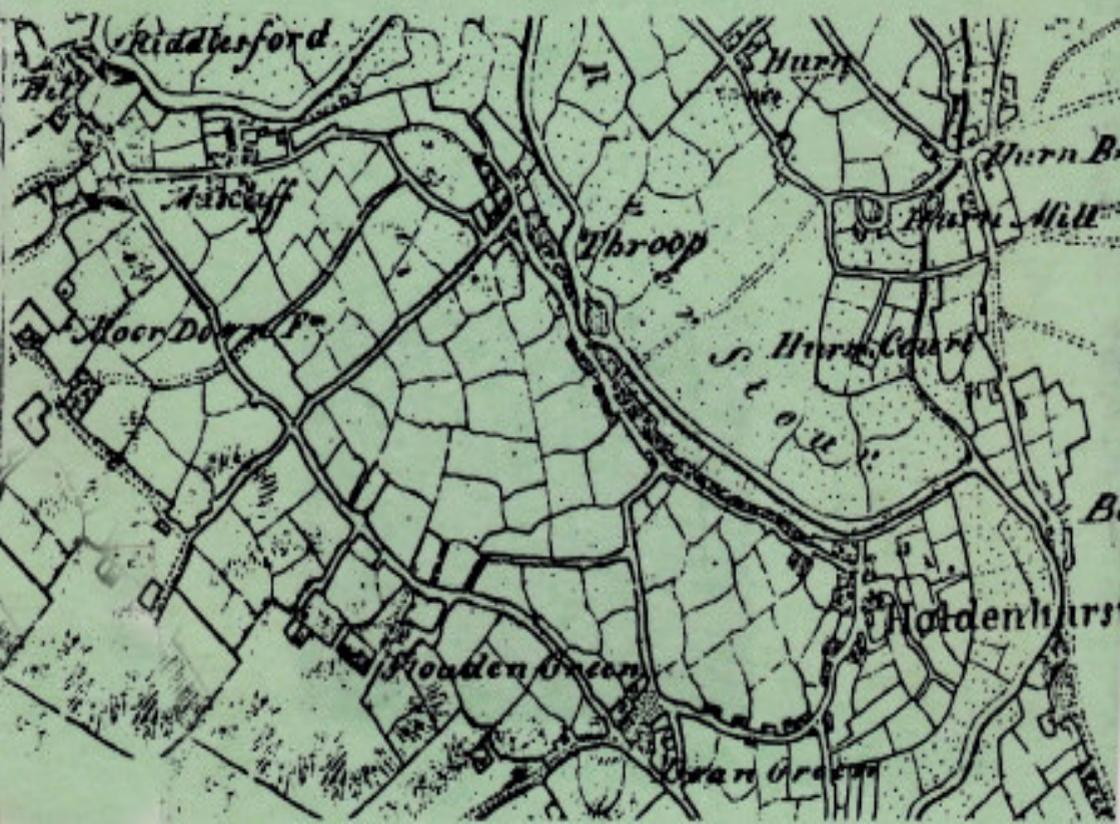


FARMER WEST
AND
MUSCLIFF FARM

1800 TO 1804



**Farmer West
and
Muscliff Farm
1800 - 1804
by
His Son**

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INTRODUCTION

These recollections were written by Edward West, the son of William West, tenant of Muscliff Farm during the period 1800 to 1804. Although perhaps rather lengthy, they contain valuable information about conditions within the Liberty of Westover at the time of the Inclosure Act. They were published as an appendix to a volume entitled "Then and Now" by William Mate in 1883, and are reprinted in booklet form now, as they may be of interest to students of local history, and to others.

FARMER WEST AND MUSCLIFFE FARM 1800-04

Many or most of the subjects alluded to in the following pages occurred under the writer's own knowledge; and of those which were not so, he was informed not long after the occurrence of them, either by one or both his parents, or by other authentic sources.

The writer's father, William West, whose name will sometimes occur in the following remarks, was born in 1760 or 61, and he received a good training and education under intelligent parents. He was a fair Latin and French scholar, and Botanist; and when a growing up young man he and two other sons of gentlemen were placed with Mr. John H——, an extensive gentleman farmer, of Suffolk, to learn "the practice and theory of farming," and where he could, on that light soil, plough an acre a day with most men. In 1782 he settled with his young wife at "Allan's" a small farm in "Melbury Abbas," Dorsetshire, the dwelling-house of which was below a steep hill well known to Dorsetshire fox-hunters as "Allan's brow" at the top of which was an arable field of about six acres; and believing this field would be more advantageous as pasture land he laid it down himself with suitable named grasses to permanent pasture. This work was performed so efficiently that his successor on the farm informed the writer some twenty-five years afterwards that "it was then the best pasture field in Melbury Parish."

In 1799 "The Government Board of Agriculture" (King George the Third being then its Patron, and the Duke of Bedford President) offered "a prize Medal" for the best essay on "laying down arable land to permanent pasture." This prize was competed for by William West, who adopted as the basis of his essay the system used by him on the field which he laid down at Allan's farm. For this essay the prize (a silver medal) was awarded to him, and it is now in the possession of his granddaughter, the only child of his oldest son.

Allan's farm was on the eastern edge of the fertile vale of Blackmoor and its land being nearly all under pasture, it produced a fair proportion of the excellent butter which Dorsetshire is celebrated for. In the home-field was an abrupt termination of Blackmoor Valley by a steep hill known as Allan's brow, from the summit of which was an extensive prospect to the west and north and south-west over scores, if not hundreds, of square miles of country; and that hill was also well known as the resort of foxes and badgers which burrowed numerously and deeply into its sandy soil, and many tales were told of depredations committed by foxes upon the poultry preserves of that and neighbouring farms, and because of which the occasional visits of fox-hounds and their followers were always welcomed.

The writer's recollection of Allan's was but limited as he was only three years old when his father removed from that farm, in the spring of 1800 to Muscliff Farm, near Christchurch, Hampshire, but he well remembers his being sent, with his oldest brother, by his mother to take leave of their friends, the large family at Whitings farm, the land of which adjoined that of Allan's but the house was about one mile distant. The soil of Muscliff Farm being chiefly of sand with a gravelly subsoil proved to be very inferior for farming purposes to that of Allan's which was a mixture of sandy loam with clay, and consequently the former, although fairly productive in damp or rainy seasons, was very deficient in that respect during dry and warm summers, and as both the years 1800 and 1801 proved to be exceptionally of the latter character, those times were long remembered by those who were then living, both light soil farmers and consumers, as the most trying which they had ever known. So great was the deficiency of corn that wheat advanced to twenty-one shillings, while many or most of the labouring classes lived upon barley bread or oatmeal; and that all might receive some share of food a Government proclamation was issued recommending that a portion of the bran should remain mixed with the flour when ground; and that no person should consume more than 1 lb. of bread in a day, and that none of those who had

vegetables to their meals should take bread also, which latter regulation was recommended and adopted by King George the Third. At that time potatoes were not so generally grown or eaten as they have been since, but in consequence of those famine years they became much more so soon afterwards.

The effect of this great deficiency of produce was ruinous to all light soil farmers, whose pasture and corn fields were so dried by want of moisture as to be unproductive of grass or grain; and by this cause landlords' rents had to be paid out of tenants' capital instead of by the produce of the lands; and thereby the farmers' sources for supplying their farms with the livestock necessary to manure the land was so seriously diminished as to prevent them from deriving satisfactory profit by farming for years afterwards, while too many of them were irretrievably ruined thereby. But it was not so with wheat on the deep loam and clay soils like those of Allan's and Whiting's and neighbouring farms, on which the penetrating fibres of the wheat roots bored deep enough into the subsoil whereby to absorb sufficient moisture, by which the wheat plants of those soils together with the brilliant sunshine of those fine summers were made so unusually productive of wheat that some years afterwards a son of the then occupier of Whiting's farm, adjoining to Allan's informed the writer "that in 1801 between his father's heavy crop of wheat, and the eight guineas a quarter which it was sold for, he made money enough to buy the land which that wheat was grown upon". But so great was the effect of the drought by those two dry summers upon his pasture clover and barley crops that the extra profit upon his wheat was all lost by that deficiency.

When seasons occur, as they sometimes do, for two years or more together, which by the absence of rain or by stormy weather so entirely deprived the farmer not only of profit, but also cause heavy loss upon him, the question naturally arises, does not common justice claim that the landlord should share such loss by being entitled to receive not exceeding half the rent? It is true that the landlord may exclaim "I had nothing to do with the weather, and therefore why should I lose half my rent?"

But the tenant may also reply with equal truth, "As your land did not yield in the late season nearly half a fair crop, in consequence of the unusually dry season, and which no system of management by me could have improved the cultivation of your farm has occasioned greater expense upon me than the produce was worth and has not left any surplus profit; and therefore why should I pay all your rent out of my capital? But if I sacrifice so much as will pay half the rent from my capital, you relinquishing the other half; will not that be equitable between us?" But however reasonable was the sharing of the loss by farmers on that dry soil might have appeared, no such equity of principle was acted upon, or perhaps thought of, for those two famine years of 1800 and 1801, and the tenant's capital was diminished for the payment of rent by at least 20s. an acre in each of those two years for which he did not receive any return, and which result ultimately affected the ruin not only of the tenant of Muscliff Farm, but also of many of his neighbours, who occupied similar light soil farms. But leaving this digression, in consequence of those two famine years, and the general want of human food throughout the country, a cry was raised by the middle and working classes against allowing so much "Waste common lands" which then existed in most rural parishes of England to remain uncultivated; and towards meeting these complaints and also to promote increase in supplies of food, many Inclosure Acts were passed every session of Parliament for several years afterwards.

For this object "Poole Heath" however barren its soil evidently was, early attracted the attention of those enterprising gentlemen who resided within convenient distance of it. At that time the total unenclosed extent of Poole Heath was perhaps not less than twenty square miles, with few, if any, other public roads over it than one from Longham to Poole, from Wimborne, from Corfe Mullen, and another from Wareham and Lytchett, all at Poole. Many wheel tracks were there, which were used almost exclusively for carting turf, to be used as fuel, from various parts of the heath to the nearest houses to which it was to be conveyed, within a few miles of that track of country; and a few other wheel tracks, or without wheel tracks, were made for driving across the heath from the

neighbouring towns and villages by parties resorting to Bournemouth for a sea bath, that being, even in those early times a favourable excursion for that object, and for whose accommodation, and for smugglers, there was a small public house and stables near to the sea. A few sheep, and occasionally small numbers of cattle, fed upon the "common" when there was any grass for them which often occurred during and after damp weather, but not in very dry seasons. The chief value of the whole district was, however, for its "turf" cut from one inch to three or four inches thick, which constituted almost the only fuel used at nearly all the houses within some miles of the "Heath". Nevertheless and regardless of its "turf" with so much dearth of food as then existed throughout Great Britain; the inclosure of "Poole Heath" was determined upon and an Act for that object was applied for; the session of Parliament of 1802 and was passed without opposition in a gentleman of the name of Clapcott being a chief leader in promoting it, and Commissioners for effecting the object were appointed accordingly.

The first meeting of the Commissioners was advertised to be held on a certain day when all parties claiming to be entitled to portions of the land were directed to attend that meeting and support their claims. This public notice of the prospective loss of their right of "turbary" or privilege of cutting unlimited supplies of turf for the almost only fuel which they used, aroused the attention of all the farmers, tradesmen, and labouring classes who resided within easy access of the Heath. They and their ancestors from time immemorial had always possessed full liberty to cut as much turf as they wanted from the Heath, without interference by anybody, and why should lawyers, or Commissioners, or anyone else now desire to deprive them of that privilege? Something must be done, they thought, and determined to maintain their time immemorial rights and privileges of as much "firing" as they and their ancestors had ever wanted, and have it still they would.

The population of the district was not numerous, but small as it was, most of the labouring men assembled at Christchurch and some of them had heard that Farmer West, of Muscliff, was a learned and a considerate man, and one who felt that to deprive the people of their right to cut turf from the common would be an unreasonable hardship upon them, they resolved to go together to Muscliff and ask his advice what they had better do, and they all proceeded for Muscliff accordingly, and taking the road through Holdenhurst and Throop, they invited the labourers of those villages to join them, which nearly all did. The writer being then only five years old he but slightly remembers the arrival of that great crowd of people in the little hamlet, which then contained but ten houses including the squire's and the farm house. The farmer and his wife were alarmed by the apparent danger of the presence of so great a multitude of people, but he went out to them, and addressing Christopher King, a respectable labouring man whom he knew, and who appeared to be a leader of the party, he said "Why Christopher, do you know that by assembling so tumultuously as you are doing you are acting illegally, and making yourselves liable to legal proceedings against you," or words to that effect. To which Christopher replied, "We know it is not right sir, but what are we to do? For they are going to take in the common, and to take away our right to cut turf, which our fore-fathers have done time out of mind, and we want to prevent it, so we have come up to see you all the way from Christchurch, and ask your advice what we are to do".

Such an appeal, and supported as it was by the presence of so many people, was irresistible by Farmer West, so on considering a little, he proposed that they should draw up an application to the Enclosure Commissioners explaining to them how they and all others who occupied houses near to the Heath had always possessed the liberty to take whatever turf they required for fuel from the common, and they, therefore, applied to them that so much of

the common land as was necessary for the same purpose should be appointed to every parish and village lying adjoining, or near to Poole Heath, and which lands should not be enclosed.

On this proposal being stated to the assembled people, they all agreed that it was the very thing that they wanted, and they asked him to draw up such a memorial for them to sign.

This he consented to, and returning to the house he wrote what appeared to him to be a proper application for the object desired for presentation to the Commissioners, which he read to them, and advised them to obtain so many signatures to it as they could get, and that some of them should present it to the Commissioners' meeting which was to be held two days afterwards. This being satisfactory to all of them they returned homewards, and procured numerous and some very respectable signatures to their application.

On the appointed day of the Commissioners' meeting, instead of only a few of them, as they were advised, they again assembled more numerous, and starting for Ringwood, where the meeting was to be held, they formed a large company for a district which had then but a comparatively small population, and when they arrived within two miles of Ringwood, they were overtaken by the Chief Commissioner, who was on horseback, and as he was known by some of their party they gave a shout, so loud that, being alarmed thereby, he set off at full gallop for the place of the meeting, at which place the great concourse of people arrived soon afterwards. A deputation of the men immediately entered the room where the Commissioners were sitting, and presented their memorial to them. On reading this document, which was respectfully worded, and being probably also alarmed by the great crowd of people assembled outside, they assented that the application was quite reasonable, and they accordingly allowed the claim to the full extent that was expected of them: "That a sufficient quantity of land for cutting turf for fuel from, should be apportioned to every parish, hamlet, and tything which adjoined or was near to Poole Heath under the Act for its

inclosure." Such an acknowledgement of the justice of their claims, and that their long accustomed right to obtain their usual supply of firing was not to be taken from them, could not fail to be satisfactory to all the people of the districts around Poole Heath. And thus was the danger of a popular commotion averted, and when the boundaries of all other claims were surveyed and apportioned under the Inclosure Act of Poole Heath, an extensive tract of land remained unenclosed for each several parish, hamlet, and tything around it, to be applied to growing turf upon for the use of all the inhabitants who chose to take it. Copies of the documents and plans relating to Poole Heath Inclosure Act ought to have been, and probably were, deposited in the parish chests of the churches of all the parishes included in the district which was comprised by that Act, and if those documents were now referred to and examined, the boundaries of the turf apportionments belonging to each of the several parishes, hamlets and tythings, ought to be seen properly described in them.

The Inclosure of Poole Heath was accordingly proceeded with, and no further molestation or hindrance was offered against it. Previous to that inclosure, the few good roads which crossed the heath were, one from Longham, one from Wimborne, and one from Corfe Mullen, all to Poole, and one between Poole, Lytchett and Wareham. The only house which then existed between Kinson on the Longham Bridge road near Constitution Hill, near Poole, was the Shoulder of Mutton roadside inn. But in 1803 a cottage, made chiefly of mud and turf walls, was built near Bourne Bottom on that road, to accommodate men employed in naming inclosure banks for neighbouring apportionments, and in planting young fir trees on the newly enclosed lands. And whatever other apparent roads then existed over the heath were for accommodating wheel tracks to the various turf cuttings and used almost exclusively for that purpose. At that time the only road from Poole to Christchurch was by Constitution Hill, Kinson, Ensbury, Redhill etc. a distance of twelve miles. There was then only one house, a cottage inn at Bournemouth, kept professedly to accommodate picnic and open sea bathing parties who resorted there on summer

afternoon pleasure excursions, and to walk on that fine sandy sea beach. But the chief use which that little cottage inn supplied was a resort for smugglers to meet at and wait until an expected lugger should appear in sight, loaded with brandy, hollands, gin, silk, and lace goods for contraband trade, at which business most of the labouring men, and some who were in respectable stations in life, assisted in, unloading and carrying away heavy loads of such smuggled articles, and also in trading in them. At that time excise and coastguards men were not nearly so numerous employed on that service as they have since been, and men occasionally engaged in smuggling had each his assumed name, by which he was as well known by his companions at the occupation, and by some neighbours, as by his own proper name. Nevertheless, small as the population then was in that district, occasional conflicts did sometimes occur near Bournemouth, between custom house officers and smugglers, as that break in the cliffs was the most convenient place for landing such goods for some miles on either side of it.

Amongst the most interesting occurrences in the summer season at Bournemouth in those times was mackerel fishing, during which some scores of men and boys took an evening walk to that shore to help the fisherman at hauling in their mackerel nets, many tons of that fish being sometimes brought ashore in them during the season, and landed on that beach, and for assisting in this work, each of the volunteers, men and boys, received a few fish for their services. But on one such occasion, after the short peace of 1802 and 1803 when Napoleon was preparing a numerous army and flotilla along the opposite French coast, and seamen of all grades were much wanted for manning the numerous British ships of war, which were assembling in various parts of the English Channel to oppose the French invaders, parties of British sailors called "Press Gangs" were sent into many localities, in which men and boys who had ever been to sea before were likely to be found, that they might impress them to serve in ships of war as long as they might be required; the law being, that any man or boy, who had ever been to sea before, even in

fishing boats, was liable to be captured for that purpose, whether willing or unwilling, to serve in a ship of war, on proof, however before a magistrate, that he really had been to sea. On the occasion in question, one fine summer evening, many of the men and boy farm labourers resident within a few miles of Bournemouth, having resorted thither to help at hauling ashore the mackerel nets, a numerous press gang, who had anticipated the presence of many people there at that time marched around them and captured all whom they could lay hold of. The fishermen took to their boats, and so got clear off upon the sea. Some of Farmer West's men, his eldest son, and two farm boys were there, and were taken, but the sailor who took the three boys, seeing a man at some distance off, who was not captured, he desired them to stand where they were while he went to seize that man, and they being thus left to themselves, ran to the cliff, which they climbed as they best could, and on reaching the top they all ran home, frightened enough yet glad to escape the press gang.

The writer's memory is not quite sure as to whether it was his brothers, or another party of boys, who were desired by their captor to stand where they were, while he went to take a man at short distance from them, but it was his brother's party who climbed the cliff, and ran home to escape from being captured.

By this occurrence about sixty men, including a few youths, were taken by the press gang, and compelled to walk five miles to Poole, the sailors under the command of a naval lieutenant guarding them with pistols and cutlasses to prevent them from escaping, and when they arrived there, they were confined through the night, to be examined on the following day before the mayor and justices, to ascertain whether they were liable or not to be detained. Great was the consternation felt and expressed by wives, parents, and others at this outrage upon the civil liberty of those whom they were interested for by family ties, and especially by wives who were thus suddenly deprived of their husbands, and by affectionate parents whose sons were so unjustifiably torn from them, and for all they knew, to be imprisoned in a king's ship for an unlimited term, and there made liable to be shot in battle or be flogged at

the caprice of the ship's captain or officers, like so many West India negro slaves were then frequently subjected to. On the other hand the lieutenant and sailors were of course highly elated by the prospect of so much bounty money as they would be entitled to for every man and boy so captured, provided he proved on examination to be liable to serve and was capable of sea service, But here, however, almost total disappointment awaited him. The law was well understood within several miles of the south and perhaps all other British coasts, that no man was liable to impressment in the Royal Navy, "who could prove that he had never been to sea," and on the following day there was such a gathering at the Poole Town Hall of relations and friends of all the captured men and boys to give evidence for each one of them severally that he was an inland man employed at inland work and had never been to sea. One man, Thomas Dimmock, had been drawn in the Militia a few years previously, but having no inclination to be a soldier, he chopped off his right fore-finger with a hatchet, the absence of which finger disabled him for service as a soldier, but the magistrates ordered that he should be severely flogged for so maiming himself. But as the loss of that finger also disabled him for sea service, he was again discharged from impressment for the same reason. And as evidence was given for every other man and youth that he had never been to sea, all those who had been so captured, with but one exception, were discharged and returned home. The case of that exception, William Hunt, was a very hard one. He had accompanied Farmer West from Melbury Abbas, when a youth, to Muscliff Farm, as domestic labourer, and had never been to sea in his life, which was proved by his master and brother, who were both there present. But the lieutenant who commanded the press gang, being greatly exasperated by having so failed in securing any of the sixty men and boys whom they had taken the previous evening, did not hesitate to swear that he had seen that young man at sea before, though he could not tell where or when it was; and as the magistrates deemed that the oath of a British naval officer was paramount to all non-official evidence that could be brought against it, William Hunt was

detained and compelled to serve as a sailor in a ship of war; and thus, without having committed any crime, he was forced against his will to go to sea, and there to serve practically as a slave, or a horse, under whatever old or young officers might be appointed over him, and during so much of his lifetime as circumstances might require him to be held in bondage for. Nor was he liberated from that service, until 1816, when the long European war caused by the ambition of Napoleon Bonaparte having terminated, upwards of a hundred thousand men of the British army and navy not being any longer wanted as soldiers, they were discharged from those services to obtain homes and employment as they could find again. As one of these William Hunt was again, after thirteen years detention, restored to his freedom, and receiving the little pay that was due to him, but without any pension, which four more years service would have entitled him to, he returned to Muscliff to find its inhabitants almost wholly changed, Muscliff Farm having had two occupiers since he was taken from it, and his brother having married and gone to reside at a village a few miles off, so that he then found himself, except by a few labourers, as a stranger amongst strangers, and chiefly through the false swearing of a naval lieutenant.

But in those days swearing was amongst the most commonly used expressions uttered by naval officers of all ranks, and from their examples by seamen also. And if the friends of a youth on his leaving school could obtain for him an appointment as midshipman in a ship of war, in many, or most instances "he soon learned to swear almost every time he spoke". And thus it was not surprising that the lieutenant who commanded the press gang by whom William Hunt was taken so readily swore to the latter's identity as a sailor without serious reflection as to whether he had ever seen him or not at sea, and which in reality he never could have done, as that young man had never been to sea. The great cause of excitement within many miles of Bournemouth in 1804 was the generally understood intention of Napoleon Bonaparte to invade England with a large army, and for which object he was preparing a fleet of very numerous gunboats, to be used for transporting the French soldiers

to some convenient landing place across the English Channel. And as Bournemouth had a fine shelving beach and sufficient depth of water for gunboats to approach within a short distance of the shore, was easy of access by its opening in the cliff to the neighbouring country in which were but few impediments for an army to encounter, and having but small population, many official and non-official authorities supposed that the landing of the French army might be attempted at that place. Great was the consternation and excitement and preparation through the southern counties of England to meet the expected emergency. Amongst other occurrences, blank forms were distributed to every householder requiring him to state upon them the position which every male inhabitant would take towards encountering or opposing the expected invading army. Nearly all those forms were returned declaring that the parties whom they were addressed to would join the volunteer army W----- being the only one who elected to collect all the cattle, sheep, pigs and horses of his village and drive them away from being taken by the invading soldiers for their own use, such driving to commence immediately on the signal being made of the actual landing of the Frenchmen.

At that time great excitement existed amongst all classes of the community to prevent the intended attack upon the national liberties of the British people, and this enthusiasm coming to the knowledge of the French Emperor, and that over 2000 men had actually enlisted in three days from the counties of Lancashire, Cheshire and Staffordshire only, into the British regular army, and proportionate numbers from every other county, he wisely reflected that his safest course would be to abandon his intended invasion of England; and, therefore, his great armies were ordered to march into other localities of his dominions, while his gunboats - in which he had placed so much confidence of his successful landing of his troops in England - were safely moored in the French harbours which they were built in until they became rotten, and in which state some of them were found by English travellers after the final termination of the war in 1815; and thus were the inhabitants who resided

those parts of Dorset and Hampshire released from their fears of the landing of the French armies at or near Bournemouth. Another but less important incident occurred at Bournemouth about that time. The Muscliff shepherd's (Dibbins) dog acted so strangely that those who saw it supposed it was mad, and as he was unwilling to destroy it - because what could a shepherd do without his sheep dog? - some of his neighbours advised him that if he would dip a mad dog in the sea until it was almost drowned such madness would thereby be cured. Accordingly, two chains being fastened to the dog's collar Dibbin took the end of one chain and George Rose the undercarter taking the loose end of the other chain to hold the dog at some distance between them so as to prevent it from biting either, they thus walked three miles across the common to Bournemouth, and on arriving there they proceeded into the sea, which Richard Dibbin, who was an inland man, had probably never done before, they holding the dog between them. But as a strong wind blew on that day there was a rough sea, and an unruly wave rolling in among them overwhelmed all the party. Dibbin and Rose contrived to reach the shore dripping wet and glad enough to escape being drowned, but greatly frightened; though not so with the poor dog, as the back wave bore it out to sea, from whence it was never seen afterwards. And the two men returned home fully satisfied with their trial of such a cure for hydrophobia.

In the spring of 1804 a sad cruel crime was committed at Parley, the next village on the north side of the River Stour, from Muscliff, which was a source of conversation there for many years afterwards. For some cause which is not now remembered, two men having resolved to murder the father of one of them, they arranged to accomplish their purpose in a stable which he was accustomed to enter very early every morning to feed his horses and having concealed themselves in the stable one fatal morning, they performed that foul deed unobserved by anyone. But suspicion soon arose against them, and they were taken into custody. The son had given a guinea to his accomplice for his help in the work which was deposited in a particular place, and which place was intimated

by the latter as where it might be found. The guinea was searched for accordingly, and there it was found, which was considered as strong evidence against them, and they were tried and convicted at the next assizes held at Winchester, where in a few days the capital sentence was executed upon them in chains. From thence their bodies, still bound by chains, were carted to a gallows erected for the purpose on Parley Common, the posts of the gallows being bound with hoop iron. To this frame the bodies were again suspended ("gibbeted") and so securely fastened that they remained there until quite decayed. The place where the gibbet was erected being elevated on a low hill, it was visible on some sides from many miles distant. A deaf and dumb man whose occupation was to cut turf on that heath, and who occasionally visited Muscliff for a Sunday's dinner, explained by signs that all that summer the smell of the bodies was so offensive as to compel him always to work on the windward side of them, and to move about at every change of wind. The gibbet posts were standing some thirty years afterwards, when some neighbours being tired of seeing them there, one night, collected a quantity of turf, and piling it around the posts, they set fire to it, and thereby burnt all the woodwork of them.

A very dangerous incident occurred at Redhillsford, near Muscliff, on the next Sabbath day after the men had been gibbeted. That being the day when the neighbouring population would not be employed at their several occupations, there was an understanding that nearly all who could get there would go to see the gibbeted men, who as they had always lived in that neighbourhood were known by the inhabitants for some miles around the scene. A Dissenting Minister had given notice of religious service to be held that afternoon at the place, which was an open heath, and Mr. Hudson (the squire), who then resided with his wife and large family at Muscliff House, proposed to Farmer West that they also should ride there, which

was agreed upon the former being attended by his groom. But as they were crossing the river at the ford, Mr. Hudson's horse would indulge his propensity for lying down in the water, and by doing so he threw his rider, who, as the river was running swiftly over the ford and was very deep immediately below it for about half a mile, he was quickly carried far down the stream, and being unable to swim, he must have been drowned but for a small branch of a tree which hung over the river, and which he caught hold of and held until he was almost exhausted, at which critical moment his neighbour West, who was a fair swimmer, and having ridden hack to the river side and jumped off his pony had made his way through the underwood as best he could, and ran down the river bank opposite the drowning Squire, and entering the water he laid hold of Hudson just as he was losing the bough and drew him out of the river with some difficulty, the water being very deep at that place, Mr. Hudson was taken to the Redhill Inn about half a mile off, where a warm bed being prepared for him he was put into it, and in a few hours had so far recovered as to be well enough to return home.

Meanwhile great was the consternation at Muscliff House as the three horses were seen running down the road without riders, and soon afterwards the groom also returned home crying and deploring that his "dear master was drowned in the river" (Stour). Mrs. Hudson, greatly alarmed at the intelligence, went to the farmhouse (some seventy yards off) with the sad information, and for the sympathy of her neighbour's wife, who she well knew was a prudent, thoughtful woman, But the latter, on hearing so far, considered it was still too doubtful to be altogether hopeless, and advised waiting until they could receive more reliable intelligence of the occurrence. Not long afterwards a man was observed hasting down the road, who soon gratified all at home with a message for Mrs. Hudson to go as quickly as she could to Redhill Inn, and take with her an entire change of clothes for her husband; which was done without delay.

Presently afterwards Farmer West himself arrived at home, but instead of appearing to be cheerful, his temper was not at all improved by the feeling of his cold wet clothes clinging around him, and his best top boots with long ears having outside, as they were then worn, still so full of water as to be difficult to take off and when that was done the water which was emptied from them formed an unpleasant looking puddle on the kitchen floor. Mr. Hudson soon recovered from that dangerous occurrence and on the following day he went out as he had done previously.

In accordance with the Poole Heath Inclosure Act, two fields of altogether about sixteen acres, more or less, of that waste were apportioned to Muscliff Farm at the distance of about one mile from the farmhouse and two miles from Bournemouth, that being then the nearest inclosed land to that shore. But the land was of but little value for farming purposes, as so much of the surface soil had, during many generations, been pared off by turf cutters, as the heath grew to maturity upon it, until but little of the soil remained over the gravel subsoil, and even that little contained so large a proportion of acid that no agricultural or other useful vegetation would thrive upon that land without a corresponding supply of lime by chalk or marl to neutralise that acid; and for that object numerous waggon loads of chalk were hauled from chalk pits some miles distant upon those two fields. The first produce that was raised on the newly broken up land in 1803 was buckwheat and other green food, for the object of feeding sheep thereupon, to manure and prepare the land for a crop of wheat in the following year 1804, and which was sowed accordingly; but as those green crops were very light, and as the latter year proved to be singularly dry and sultry, as much or more so as those of 1800 and 1801, so also was that and other land having a light sandy soil and gravelly subsoil, as all that district for many miles around was, proved to be singularly unproductive of grain and grass and green food; and consequently the produce of those two fields of "common" land for 1803 and 1804 did not repay the cost of cultivation and seed. Whether the neighbours

waited to ascertain the result of Farmer West's cultivation of that newly inclosed heath land and were disappointed, or from whatever other cause, no other of such land was attempted to be cultivated within the writer's knowledge in that neighbourhood, but all the other newly inclosed land except that apportioned for turf cutting was planted with small Scotch firtrees. Many thousand acres of the newly inclosed land was planted with young pine or Scotch fir trees of only two, three or four years growth; but as the planting was done by contract at per thousand, the object of those planters was naturally to set in the greatest number of trees in a short time as they could plant them, regardless of whether they were desired to grow well or not, or with sufficient soil placed over the roots. The writer saw many of them for which a slight hole had been dug in the gravel subsoil, and the single spadeful of gravel so taken out had been thrown upon the root when it was placed in the hole, which completed the planting without any further surface soil being placed about the root; and this occurred, not to a single tree only, but perhaps to half the trees that were planted on that heath. In fact the planting generally was performed so carelessly for promoting the growth of those young fir trees as to excite the scorn of most people who resided in the neighbourhood of them, a common remark about them being that "many of the trees were planted with the roots uppermost," and consequently although most or nearly all those trees contrived to retain vitality, yet the growth or thriving of them, together with the want of shelter was so slight that when the writer walked a few miles over the heath in 1816, very numerous trees had not then attained to three feet high, and were still of stunted and unhealthy appearance. However, the exceptionally wet summers of 1816-17 and 1820 stimulated the little vitality which then existed in those trees, and supplied them with a start of growth which in a few years more gave them shelter to each other, and from that time they have thriven much better and more rapidly, so as to have since become a forest of pine wood.

One evidence of Farmer West's superior judgement and knowledge of land occurred soon after his arrival at Muscliffe Farm. The lane from the Wimborne and Christchurch highroad to Muscliff, Throop and Holdenhurst, and known as "Muscliff Lane", was then

the thoroughfare for all wheel conveyances from Poole, Wimborne, Kingston, etc., to those villages, and which was for the first quarter of a mile in so neglected a state and abounding in cart ruts, and which latter, after heavy rain, were so many pools of water as to be almost dangerous for conveyances; the surface of the lane being (except by the wheel ruts) nearly flat from one side to the other. To obviate this inconvenience the farmer volunteered three of his own teams, and prevailed upon two neighbours to send one each, by which means the soil was thrown by ploughing from the two sides to form a fairly wide road in the middle of the lane to a convex surface about one foot higher at the centre than at the sides, thus making sufficient slope towards the sides to allow rain to run off, and thereby preserving the road always dry. Upon this central part, which was sufficiently wide to allow two carriages to pass each other conveniently, was thrown many cartloads of gravel to nearly one foot thickness, by which an excellent and permanent road was made, the gravel being carted from an extensive quarry of that article on the neighbouring "common". This was precisely the plan adopted by Mr. J. L. McAdam, some twelve years afterwards and subsequently, and which so raised his fame as a road maker throughout Great Britain. Many years afterwards, on the writer revisiting Muscliff, he was reminded by an old neighbour that "father had made that lane into so good a road."

Two or three occurrences relating to the animal creation which excited the writer's notice at Muscliff may deserve the attention of those who feel interested in that subject. When Farmer West went to reside at Muscliff, some forty, more or less, elm trees were growing upon perhaps half an acre of land at the corner of the "Great Ground", near the back of the farmhouse, and the first spring of his residence there, a small colony of rooks built their nests for the first time in the tops of some of those trees. A neighbouring farmer, a very ignorant man,

who had a small field a short distance from the place, disapproved of the rooks being allowed to build so near to his land, and applied to have them driven away because of the injury which he supposed they would commit upon his corn, especially as he saw them frequent his field of young wheat. But Farmer West thought differently and having shot one of the rooks as it returned from feeding, and on its maw being opened and examined, numerous wire worms were found in it. This evidence was so conclusive of the rooks innocence when amongst young wheat in the spring, that no further objection was made against them; and they continued to build increasingly numerous nests every spring afterwards.

In the early years of the writer's residence at Muscliff, he often noticed the fine specimens of the larger "stag beetle" but whether they were destroyed by rooks, then newly colonised there, or by some other animals, they became less numerous annually, so that in 1804 only the legs and other fragments of two or three were seen, the bodies of which had evidently been devoured by a bird or some other animal.

Previous to the inclosure of Poole Heath, all the three species of English snakes, the common snake, the viper or adder, and the slow worm, were very numerous upon, and within, some miles of that district. The writer has seen them lying near together in a ditch under a thick hedge by the "common" side, but on seeing him they crept so quickly into the hedge that he was unable to distinguish whether they were common snakes or adders. Common snakes and slow worms are harmless reptiles, and no danger would issue from a bite from either of them; in fact, they are so timid as to creep away as they best can without attempting to defend themselves. But the adder, or viper, is dangerously venomous; it may be known by diamond shaped marks, more or less faint, across the back, and is a sluggish animal, especially in cold weather. It soon becomes enraged, which it shows by exhibiting its poison fangs from its upper jaws with which it bites any animal that offends it; the bite causing the foot of the fang to press upon the poison bag behind it, and thereby bursting the bag, the poison flows from it upon whatever the fang may have been so pressed against, and thus the venom is introduced

to the wound so made, and thereby it is conveyed in the blood through the body of the victim. The poison of the viper or adder is the essence, as all such poisons are, of a very strong acid which causes its deadly effect upon animal life, but that effect may be materially neutralised or reduced by the immediate application to the wound of any oil or grease, which such oil saponises or converts into a soapy state, whereby the strength of the poison is greatly counteracted or deprived of its most dangerous tendency. Some sixty years ago this remedy against such poisons was comonly understood by many intelligent landowners and farmers, who caused holes to be made in some of their gate-posts in which to place a small bottle of "adder oil", that any person bitten by a viper, or stung by a bee, might immediately find out and apply a remedy against such injury.

But the occupation of Muscliff Farm by Farmer West was brought to an unsatisfactory termination by the end of his fifth year of it. The light soil of that farm, although highly productive, if fairly manured, in damp seasons, was ruinous to its occupier when the summers were exceptionally warm and dry and long; and this occurred in 1801, of which summer Mrs. J. Gilbert (the Ann Taylor, one of the authoresses of "Original Poems") wrote: "There may be some who have mournful reasons for remembering the fearful hot and dry summer of 1801. During many sultry weeks the sun looked out of the steel blue sky as if he had no pity. The pasture fields gaped with thirst; the streets even of clean Colchester became almost fetid from the want of rain, not a cloud of promise came, and fever broke out with us as in most parts of the kingdom." The effect of that long dry sultry summer was also equally felt throughout Great Britain, Muscliff Farm inclusive, as in Essex by the drying of its pastures until grass no longer grew upon them, and all other farm produce was stunted and imperfectly grown and was sadly unremunerative to the occupier, thereby causing to him in that year heavy loss instead of profit by his occupation.

And very similar was the unproductive effect on Muscliff Farm by the long dry hot summer of 1801, so much that the water of the only three ponds in that hamlet was all evaporated to dryness, and the cattle had to go for their needful supplies of

water to the river a quarter of a mile from the farm yard, and the writer remembers the turnips on the farm instead of being a few pounds weight each were only about the size of oranges or apples. The barley was so thin in the grain as to be fit only for cattle food and even the wheat was not much better, especially that grown on the newly inclosed heathland which produced but little more weight of grain than the seed it was grown from.

And thus the drought of the sultry summer of 1804 following so nearly after that of 1801, was disastrous to farmer West and especially as his capital was previously so limited for that large farm that some addition to it had been borrowed of a neighbouring relative. And the latter having died in 1804 the payment of that borrowed money was necessarily required by that relative's Trustees, and consequently between the return of that borrowed money and no profit from the farm, even for rent having been made from the farm the whole of Farmer West's capital was absorbed for those two objects, and for wages and taxes, and hence followed the breaking up of his occupation of Muscliff Farm; all consequent upon the unproductive sultry summers of 1801 and 1804, which no superior excellence of farming could have averted. And by such occurrences why should not the landlord be equally as amenable for half the loss occasioned by such drought as the occupier, instead of the latter having to bear the whole of it? This failure of his prospects in life caused such a shock upon poor Farmer West's wasted energies that he was for months afterward in a depressed state of mind; and his business abilities were so impaired that he never succeeded in any occupation which he subsequently attempted.
